



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

September 14, 1999

1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Endangered Species Coordinator
Nongame Coordinator
Ken McDonald, Native Species Coordinator
Missoula Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
North Powell Conservation District
U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Helena
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Big Blackfoot Chapter Trout Unlimited, Lubrecht Forest Box 1, Greenough, MT 59836

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Please find enclosed an Environmental Assessment prepared for a Future Fisheries Project tentatively planned to enhance habitat diversity on approximately 4,000 feet of Monture Creek with the addition of large woody debris. This proposed project is located approximately 5 miles west of the town of Ovando in Powell County.

Please submit any comments that you have by 5 P.M., October 15, 1999 to the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Completion of this project is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432.

Sincerely,

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Monture Creek Habitat Restoration Project

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-272 through 273 which directs the Department to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The program involves physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. This project is being proposed to create greater habitat diversity for fluvial bull trout and cutthroat trout in Monture Creek by installing log vanes, deflector logs and rootwads in a manner that is consistent with the characteristics of the stream channel. This proposed project is a continuation of habitat enhancement efforts that were begun in 1997. The project site, involving a single property owner, is located approximately 5 miles west of the town of Ovando in Powell County (Attachment 1).

I. Location of Project: This project will be conducted on Monture Creek located approximately 5 miles west of the town of Ovando within Township 15 North, Range 13 West, Sections 26 and 27 in Powell County.

II. Need for the Project: Department Goal C indicates that a Fisheries Division objective is to "provide and support programs to conserve and enhance high quality aquatic habitat and protect native aquatic species." The Future Fisheries Improvement Program is a tool to help achieve that objective.

Monture Creek has been degraded by past stream-side management practices, including overgrazing by livestock and the clearing of riparian timber. This past activity has resulted in a simplification of aquatic habitat, with reduced pool habitat and overhead cover. In particular, the lack of in-channel large woody debris has contributed to the homogenous, low diversity habitat that is characteristic of the project area. The project calls for the addition of instream woody debris. Under current ownership, the riparian corridor is being managed for fish and wildlife values. Riparian fencing was installed in 1998 to exclude the project area from livestock grazing and no timber harvest activities are planned. The project is intended to compliment previous work completed in the Monture Creek watershed.

III. Scope of the Project:

The proposal calls for increasing habitat diversity on approximately 4,000 feet of stream channel by installing woody debris in a manner consistent with methodologies associated with a Rosgen C4 and B4 channel type. The addition of large woody debris would include the installation of rootwads and associated deflector logs and the placement of log spur vanes to create lateral scour pools and reduce the rate of lateral erosion. The project is expected to cost \$15,000.00. Of this total, the Future Fisheries Improvement Program would be contributing up to \$5,000.00.

IV. Environmental Impact Checklist:

Please see attached checklist.

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Terrestrial and aquatic life and habitats.

The addition of large woody debris into Monture Creek would create greater habitat diversity for wild fish populations, including the native westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. This increase in habitat diversity would improve the environmental requirements for westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout; especially reproduction, rearing and over-wintering habitat.

2. Water quantity, quality and distribution.

Short term increases in turbidity will occur during project construction. To minimize turbidity, construction will occur during a low flow period and operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. The Department of Environmental Quality will be contacted to determine narrative conditions required to meet short-term water quality standards and protect aquatic biota. A 310 permit will be obtained from the local Conservation District. In the long term, reducing the rate of lateral erosion would reduce the sediment contribution to downstream areas, thereby improving the quality of downstream waters.

3. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture.

Soils along the stream margin would be disturbed by the installation of root wads and log spurs, but would stabilize quickly with the re-establishment of vegetation. Overall, the project is expected to reduce bank erosion and improve channel stability.

4. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality.

Some riparian vegetation would be disturbed as a result of the installation of rootwads and log spurs. This disturbed vegetation would be expected to recover very quickly, especially since the riparian corridor is being managed as an exclosure to livestock grazing.

5. Aesthetics.

Aesthetics would be enhanced by diversifying the existing homogenous aquatic habitat that is characteristic of the project area. "Soft" techniques incorporating natural materials would be used to increase the presence of large woody debris in approximately 4,000 feet of stream channel.

7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources.

Monture Creek supports both westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout. Westslope cutthroat trout have recently been petitioned for listing under the Endangered Species Act and bull trout are listed as threatened under the Act. Because Monture Creek supports bull trout, the project will be included in Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Section 6 Conservation Plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The proposal calls for enhancing the diversity of the aquatic habitat with the addition of large woody debris. This activity is expected to improve aquatic habitat for all life stages of both bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout.

9. Historic and archaeological sites

The proposed project will likely require an individual Army Corp of Engineers 404 permit. Therefore, the State Historic Preservation Office has been contacted to determine the need for compliance with the federal historic preservation regulations. The project will not begin until a cultural clearance is granted.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

7. Access to & quality of recreational activities.

It is anticipated that the enhancement of 4,000 feet of Monture Creek would improve overall aquatic habitat and, as a result, would enhance trout populations residing in the stream. Migrant trout populations from the main stem of the Blackfoot River also would be expected to be enhanced. Consequently, the recreational fishery in both Monture Creek and the Blackfoot River would be expected to be improved.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, this segment of Monture Creek will continue to provide low quality, homogenous habitat for aquatic life. As a result, densities of fish populations (including westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout) will remain low. Recreational opportunities associated with fish and wildlife resources will remain reduced and aesthetics will continue to be impaired.

2. The Proposed Alternative

The proposed alternative is designed to add habitat diversity to the stream channel by installing large woody debris in the form of rootwads and log spurs. This increase in habitat diversity, especially increases in pool and cover habitat, would provide enhanced habitat for reproduction, rearing and over-wintering for fish. The project would reduce rates of lateral erosion and would improve recruitment and survival of native westslope

cutthroat trout and bull trout to the Blackfoot River. This alternative would improve fish and wildlife habitat, aesthetics and water quality within the project area and would be expected to increase trout populations in both Monture Creek and the main stem of the Blackfoot River.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section

1. Is an EIS required? No.

We conclude from this review that the proposed activities will have a positive impact on the physical and human environment.

2. Level of public involvement.

The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the Future Fisheries Improvement Program. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and will be contingent upon their approval. The Environmental Assessment (EA) is being distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter. The EA will be published on the Montana Electronic Bulletin Board.

3. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5 P.M. on October 15, 1999.

4. Person responsible for preparing the EA.

Mark Lere, Program Officer
Habitat Protection Bureau
Fisheries Division
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 East 6th Avenue
Helena, MT 59620

Telephone: (406) 444-2432

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS
 1420 E 6th Ave, PO BOX 200701, Helena, MT 59620-0701
 (406) 444-2535

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Title Monture Creek Habitat Restoration Project

Division/Bureau Fisheries Division -Future Fisheries Improvement

Description of Project The project is being proposed to create greater habitat diversity for fluvial bull trout and cutthroat trout in Monture Creek by installing log vanes, deflector logs and rootwads in a manner that is consistent with the characteristics of the stream channel. The project is intended to compliment previous habitat work completed in the Monture Creek watershed. The project site, involving a single landowner, is located approximately 5 miles west of the town of Ovando in Powell County.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Terrestrial & aquatic life and habitats		X				X
2. Water quality, quantity & distribution			X			X
3. Geology & soil quality, stability & moisture			X			X
4. Vegetation cover, quantity & quality			X			X
5. Aesthetics			X			X
6. Air quality				X		
7. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources			X			X
8. Demands on environmental resources of land, water, air & energy				X		
9. Historical & archaeological sites				X		X

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

	MAJOR	MODERATE	MINOR	NONE	UNKNOWN	COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES
1. Social structures & mores				X		
2. Cultural uniqueness & diversity				X		
3. Local & state tax base & tax revenue				X		
4. Agricultural or industrial production				X		
5. Human health				X		
6. Quantity & distribution of community & personal income				X		
7. Access to & quality of recreational and wilderness activities			X			X
8. Quantity & distribution of employment				X		
9. Distribution & density of population & housing				X		
10. Demands for government services				X		
11. Industrial & commercial activity				X		
12. Demands for energy				X		
13. Locally adopted environmental plans & goals				X		
14. Transportation networks & traffic flows				X		

Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction North Powell Conservation District, NRCS, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corp of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

Individuals or groups contributing to this EA Big Blackfoot Chapter of Trout Unlimited; Ron Pierce, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Recommendation concerning preparation of EIS No EIS required.
EA prepared by : Mark Lere
Date: September 14, 1999
